

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
Minutes of January 9, 2018

- I. ROLL CALL.** Chair Kenneth W. Goslant, Selectmen Lynn Doney, Julie H. Goodrich, Kenneth Johnson, and K. David Maxwell. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Chris Loyer (Green Mountain Transit), Liza Walker (Vermont Land Trust), Laura Hill-Eubanks (Conservation Commission), Sally Davidson (Recreation Committee), Arlington Supplee (Lister), Chris Bradley (Lister), Jay Pedley, Christine Barnes, Thomas Alsheimer, Jane Pekol, Susan Popowski, Andy Hird, Alicia Hird, Steve Davis, and Elroy C. Hill.

Chair Goslant called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

- II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.** The Board members and the public were asked to rise and recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

- III. SET/ADJUST AGENDA.** Chair Goslant noted a few people present who would like to speak on the proposed VHCB easement and asked this matter be moved forward in the agenda under "Public Participation."

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED)

- a. Chris Loyer, Green Mountain Transit (GMT).** Mr. Loyer is present to answer any questions the Select Board members might have regarding the article on the 2018 Town Meeting Warning in which GMT is asking for \$21,000 for the continued operation of the Northfield-Montpelier Commuter service. This is the twenty percent (20%) local match for this service with the balance of the service expense covered by state and federal funds. Selectman Maxwell asked what would happen should the ballot article be rejected by voters. Mr. Loyer said the service would be discontinued. Selectman Maxwell asked what was the average ridership for the commuter service. Mr. Loyer said there were 7007 riders in FY 2016/2017, which averages to 27.26 per day for this weekday only service. This is a five percent (5%) increase over the previous fiscal year. Selectman Goodrich asked why there was a fifteen percent (15%) decrease in ridership during FY 2015/2016. Mr. Loyer said this was part of a national trend for mass transit linked to lower gasoline prices. Selectman Maxwell asked how much the Northfield community subsidizes each rider each month. Mr. Loyer said about \$17.63 per month. Selectman Maxwell asked if there was any danger of the state and federal funding for this service disappearing. Mr. Loyer did not think so. Selectman Maxwell asked how many of the commuter riders live in Northfield. Mr. Loyer said GMT doesn't track riders' hometowns but noted 57% of commuter service rides originate in Northfield and the rest are in-bound. Selectman Goodrich asked about the fares GMT charges. Mr. Loyer said GMT sets its rates regionally based on the extensiveness of the local system as well as what the market will bear, i.e. what riders can afford. In the Central Vermont area, commuter service riders are charged \$2.00 per trip. There are discounts available with multi-ride tickets, etc. He added GMT has not raised its fares for the past six (6) years. Chair Goslant thanked Mr. Loyer for the information presented tonight.
- b. Laura Hill Eubanks, Northfield Conservation Commission (NCC): TDS Telecom Land Purchase.** Ms. Hill-Eubanks said the NCC has been negotiating with TDS Telecom on the possible purchase of its property near the top of Paine Mountain. If purchased, the land-locked parcel would be annexed to the adjoining Town Forest. At the last Select Board regular meeting (12/12/17), the Select Board decided not to approve an easement for the entire Town Forest that the Vermont Land Trust had requested before providing two-thirds of the purchase price (\$35,000). Instead, the Select Board asked the NCC to seek public funding for the purchase through a ballot article on the 2018 Town Meeting Warning. Selectman Maxwell said he had recommended this since not just Select Board members but also members of the Utility Commissions were reluctant to grant an easement for the entire Town Forest (±350 acres) so a forty-three (43) acre parcel could be purchased. He also had suggested NCC petition to put the article on the warning as a way of gauging grass roots support for this land purchase. Ms. Hill-Eubanks is hoping the Select Board will put the article on the warning without a petition as an indication of its support for the purchase. There also are time restraints that would preclude gathering enough signatures.

Selectman Johnson said the Select Board members didn't have an issue with the land purchase itself but with the easement that would cover property the municipality has owned for several years. Chair Goslant said the Utility Commissions showed no support for an easement that would threaten the municipality's control over one of its main water sources (Cheney Farm Reservoir). Ms. Hill-Eubanks said this area could be excluded from the easement. Noting that Liza Walker from the Vermont Land Trust was present, Chair Goslant asked if any additional negotiations regarding easement conditions were possible. Ms. Walker said she was here to support Ms. Hill-Eubanks on the land purchase. She added the focus of the easement was not eliminating municipal control over the Town Forest but to ensure its protection as well as directing public access. The Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB) will not provide the aforementioned grant funds unless an easement is provided for the entirety of the Town Forest. Ms. Walker has worked with several Vermont municipalities on similar easements and to date over seventy (70) have easements covering their municipal forests. There is some area for discussion regarding this easement's provisions. Selectman Maxwell just feels it is better for Northfield to purchase the property directly.

Selectman Goodrich favors a ballot article for the land purchase but does not want it to provide the entire land purchase price. It was her understanding when the grant was to cover two-thirds of the purchase price, NCC was going to fundraise for the remaining funds. Ms. Hill-Eubanks said the grant would have covered all but \$5,000 of the purchase price. NCC now would prefer the ballot article cover the entire purchase price. She noted TDS Telecom has been patient with delays over the purchase but would like the transaction completed by August 2018. NCC is not sure it can fundraise \$5,000 in less than five months. Chair Goslant felt requesting less than the full purchase price might gain more public support for the ballot article. Ms. Hill-Eubanks asked what dollar figure the Select Board would like for the ballot article. Selectman Maxwell suggested a target fundraising amount of \$10,000, which would mean the amount specified in the article would be \$25,000. This matter will be discussed later in the meeting.

- c. Christine Barnes: Town Meeting Ballot Article ("Northfield's Energy Future").** Ms. Barnes and Jane Pekol are NCC members and they would like an article on the Town Meeting Warning asking for voter support for "an energy future for Northfield citizens which reduces energy waste and expense, transitions from fossil fuels to renewable energy, builds an economy that fosters innovation, entrepreneurship, and ensures that energy policy has a place of prominence in the Town Plan." Ms. Barnes noted there is a state mandate calling for a ninety percent (90%) reduction in the use of fossil fuels by 2050. She would like this mandate publicized as well as a discussion of the various steps that can be taken to achieve this goal. A discussion at Town Meeting would be the ideal starting point for a series of public forums at which community perspectives can be provided regarding what local initiatives (if any) should be taken to meet this mandate as well as addressing the larger issue of global climate change.

Chair Goslant said the local municipality, largely through its ownership of the Northfield Electric Department (NED), already has taken steps to meet the 2050 mandate as well as other similar requirements with more pressing deadlines. For example, the municipality worked with the private interests behind the new Bull Run Solar Farm in order to increase NED's portfolio of renewable energy sources. Selectman Maxwell noted a 2019 state mandate that requires NED to purchase increasing amounts of renewable energy while gradually phasing out fossil fuel sources. In addition, the municipality already is working with the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) on inserting correct language into the next revision of the Northfield Town Plan to reflect these goals. Selectman Maxwell felt the municipality has taken significant steps to reduce local dependence on fossil fuels and much of these efforts are funded by NED ratepayers through the Energy Efficiency Charge (EEC) included on their monthly bills.

Ms. Pekol still would like the Town Meeting discussion in order to inform residents what they themselves can do to address these concerns. She also would like the local government to take additional steps in this matter beyond the purchase of renewable energy. Selectman Goodrich asked if this discussion can take place without this specific article on the warning. Ms. Barnes said there is a regional effort to get this issue on every town meeting warning in Central Vermont. Selectman Johnson believes there also should be some discussion of how homeowners have reduced their energy usage (and costs) by switching to more efficient alternative heating sources. Selectman Goodrich felt the article wording implies that the local government hasn't done anything to address these concerns when in fact the opposite is true. Chair Goslant noted the Utility Commissions often focus on renewable energy matters in their public meetings and encouraged all those interested to attend and provide their own suggestions on what should be done. Ms. Barnes felt interaction with the Utility Commissions might be a good first step before any public forums are held so that the current status of local energy conservation efforts can be determined.

d. Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB) Proposed Easement.

Manager Schulz said the VHCB would like an easement on the Water Street properties that were a part of the FEMA buyout process and on which the new Water Street Park is situated. Once the easement has been finalized and signed, VHCB will release the remaining grant funds that will reimburse the municipality for the twenty percent (20%) local match amount. A thirty (30) day public notification period was required before any action could be taken and this period has expired without any significant public response. Selectman Maxwell has been informed that there was an expectation from the very beginning of this project that the municipality would provide this easement when all the work in the Water Street area (flood mitigation, nature park construction, etc.) had been concluded. Manager Schulz confirmed he has learned that a former town manager (Rob Lewis) did sign a document committing the municipality to approve the VHCB easement in return for matching fund amount. However, Manager Schulz would like to postpone any easement approval until a management plan has been developed. There is no deadline for easement approval and he felt it would be best to coordinate the management plan with any specific easement provisions.

Andy Hird is not surprised VHCB is asking for additional control over the new park in return for grant funds. However, he is concerned about what would be the decision-making process when it has to be determined what can and cannot be allowed in the park. Mr. Hird would like to know whether the municipality or VHCB would be the final authority on this and whether there would be any provision for an appeal process. Selectman Maxwell thought the management plan should address these concerns. Selectman Johnson noted the VHCB representative (Kris Hammer) who addressed the Select Board at a regular meeting (11/14/17) seemed to suggest the need for the easement was to ensure public access to the park site but the draft easement provided has a number of restrictions on what can be done with the property.

Jay Pedley has worked with the Northfield High School Class of 1957 and other groups in raising funds for a pavilion to be sited in the Water Street Park. He said \$29,000 has been raised to date and there is a pledge for an additional \$10,000 to make the park more user-friendly. He noted the park's walking paths already are being well-used by Mayo Healthcare residents and others in the neighborhood. Other than the pavilion, which is permitted since it will be located next to the street, Mr. Pedley is unsure what else can be placed in the park, i.e. playground equipment, etc. Selectman Maxwell said FEMA restrictions banning permanent structures were clear from the beginning of the buyout process. He doesn't feel the municipality will approve any easement that hasn't been fully researched and been made subject to public comment. Chair Goslant said Manager Schulz will keep Mr. Pedley and other interested parties fully informed of any future developments.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **December 7, 2017 (Budget Meeting).** Motion by Selectman Goodrich, seconded by Selectman Maxwell, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **December 12, 2017 (Budget Meeting).** Motion by Selectman Johnson, seconded by Selectman Maxwell, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 4-0-1, with Selectman Doney abstaining.**
- c. **December 12, 2017 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Selectman Johnson, seconded by Selectman Goodrich, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 4-0-1, with Selectman Doney abstaining.**
- d. **December 14, 2017 (Budget Meeting).** Motion by Selectman Johnson, seconded by Selectman Goodrich, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- e. **December 19, 2017 (Budget Meeting).** Motion by Selectman Maxwell, seconded by Selectman Doney, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- f. **December 28, 2017 (Special Meeting).** Motion by Selectman Johnson, seconded by Selectman Doney, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 3-0-2, with Selectmen Goodrich and Maxwell abstaining.**

VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Validation of Warrant #13-18.** Motion by Selectman Doney, seconded by Selectman Johnson, to validate the approval by signature of Warrant #13-18 in the amount of \$259,864.53. **Motion passed 3-0-2, with Selectmen Goodrich and Maxwell abstaining.**
- b. **Warrant #14-18.** Motion by Selectman Maxwell, seconded by Selectman Doney, to approve Warrant #14-18 in the amount of \$375,624.11. Selectman Goodrich noted the purchase of several sets of tire chains. Selectman Maxwell said the Highway Department goes through a lot of chains each winter. Chair Goslant added tire chains are purchased in bulk because they get heavy usage and break down relatively quickly. Manager Schulz confirmed the insurance company insists on their usage on every highway truck because Northfield has many roads with steep slopes, etc. Selectman Johnson saw some tire rims were bought and hoped such purchases are kept under control. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- c. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through December 17, 2017.** Motion by Selectman Maxwell, seconded by Selectman Johnson, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$91,056.89. Selectman Doney saw a \$352 Blue Cross buyout payment and asked if this was an annual or monthly expense. Manager Schulz said it was monthly. Selectman Doney would like the issue of buyout payments reviewed when the next union contract is negotiated. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- d. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through December 31, 2017.** Motion by Selectman Maxwell, seconded by Selectman Doney, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$97,042.92. Selectman Maxwell is grateful Police Department overtime expenses seem to be under control. Manager Schulz lamented that recent winter storms have resulted in a big increases in Highway Department overtime. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **TDS Land Purchase.** After considering the matter, Ms. Hill-Eubanks now feels that \$25,000 is an acceptable request amount for the ballot article. There was no objection from the Select Board members. Selectman Maxwell would like wording in the article that specifies that the remaining \$10,000 of the purchase price will be obtained through soliciting donations. Manager Schulz will work on this.
- b. **Board of Listers Vacancy.** Manager Schulz stated Susan Popowski recently resigned from the Board of Listers and the two (2) remaining Listers (Arlington Supplee and Chris Bradley) have requested that the Select Board appoint someone to fill the vacancy. The appointment would last until Town Meeting Day (03/06/18), when it is expected the successful applicant will seek election to remain in the position. There have been two (2) applicants: Thomas Alsheimer and Ken Hepburn.

Mr. Supplee, who serves as Lister Chair, said he encouraged Mr. Alsheimer several months ago to seek election as Lister and then when the vacancy arose to apply for appointment. Mr. Supplee added he and Mr. Alsheimer attended a two-day training session last September conducted by the Vermont Department of Taxation and he is confident of Mr. Alsheimer's ability to serve in the position. In fact, both he and Mr. Bradley recommend his appointment. Mr. Alsheimer said he has worked as a building contractor for several years and as he is intending to reduce his workload, he would like to get into public service. Motion by Selectman Maxwell, seconded by Selectman Johnson, to appoint Thomas Alsheimer to serve on the Board of Listers until the position's term expires on Town Meeting Day 2018. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- c. **Municipal Building Furnace Replacement.** Manager Schulz said the current furnace was installed in 1991 and now is nearing the end of its expected service period. He solicited bids for its replacement and received one from Gillespie Fuels in the amount of \$14,000. The new furnace would meet all Efficiency Vermont requirements so the municipality would start receiving rebates upon its installation. Since this would take a couple days, Manager Schulz would like to wait for spring. However, the Gillespie Fuels employee who inspected the current furnace reported it is still is operating at eighty-five percent (85%) efficiency and could provide an additional four (4) or five (5) years of service. Since the current furnace is operating so well, Chair Goslant would rather focus on some of the more pressing concerns in the building first. He suggested the furnace replacement be postponed for the time being. There was no objection.
- d. **Norwich Commons Drainage Issue (possible executive session).** Since the Select Board last discussed this matter, Manager Schulz has had an extended conversation with the Norwich Commons owner (Michael Krause) about possible solutions to his concerns about stormwater issues. As this matter has various legal implications, Manager Schulz would like hold any further discussion later in the meeting in executive session. There was no objection.

VIII. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **Northfield Highway Department.** Selectman Doney wanted to commend the highway crew for their exceptional work during the recent snowstorms. He singled out Blaine Pedley for his outstanding work keeping the sidewalks clear of snow and ice. Manager Schulz confirmed the highway employees put in a lot of extra time over the holiday season. Selectman Goodrich asked when the replacement truck would be delivered. Manager Schulz said we are still looking at early February. He and Highway Foreman Trent Tucker did look into the possibility of renting a vehicle until then but nothing appropriate is available. He does feel the highway crew should be able to manage the situation until then with what is now on hand. Selectman Goodrich recently has heard a number of complaints about the roads. Manager Schulz believes some residents have unrealistic expectations regarding winter road maintenance. Chair Goslant then thanked all the municipal departments that have had to struggle through this period of bad weather.
- b. **Town Buildings & Energy Committee.** Selectmen Maxwell and Doney would like to inspect the Fire Station and Town Garage later this week to view for themselves the existing problems and how they should be addressed. Manager Schulz will make arrangements for the inspections.

IX. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. **DRAFT Municipal Parks Ordinance.** Manager Schulz has drafted an ordinance that would govern public use of the municipal parks. As this is an early draft, he welcomes any comments and suggestions from the Select Board members. Chair Goslant felt it would be worthwhile to forward a copy to the Recreation Committee for its input. Selectman Goodrich also would like Police Chief Jennings involved since it will be his officers enforcing the ordinance. Selectman Johnson would like consistent rules for all the parks. Manager Schulz said this was the beginning of this process and there will be many opportunities for public comment before the proposed ordinance is approved.

- b. **Cross Brothers Dam.** Manager Schulz has been approached by the State of Vermont and Friends of the Winooski River on the possibility of removing the Cross Brothers Dam that is situated just east of the Main Street Bridge. He will bring more information to the Select Board as this develops. Selectman Johnson noted this part of the Dog River has a considerable amount of gravel built up in the riverbed and he hoped its removal might become part of this project.

X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. **Steve Davis: Highway Concerns.** Mr. Davis has been reviewing the minutes of the recent budget meetings and is concerned that the Select Board may not be setting aside enough money for future highway paving and road maintenance. He felt our roads already are in very bad condition and will just get worse should the municipality keep falling behind in its responsibilities. Mr. Davis also would like the Highway Committee meetings warned properly so that members of the public can participate. He also feels this is a violation of the Open Meeting Law. Selectman Goodrich doesn't believe these meetings have to be warned since a quorum of Select Board members is not present and the committee doesn't make any binding decisions (only suggestions). Manager Schulz will research this matter further and take appropriate action if warranted.

- XI. EXECUTIVE SESSION.** Motion by Selectman Maxwell, seconded by Selectman Goodrich, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1), in order to discuss a legal matter with Manager Schulz present. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 9:40 p.m.

Motion by Selectman Maxwell, seconded by Selectman Goodrich, to come out of executive session. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board came out of executive session at 10:15 p.m. No action was taken.

- XII. ADJOURNMENT.** Motion by Selectman Johnson, seconded by Selectman Goodrich, to adjourn. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 10:16 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

An audio recording of this meeting is available in the Town Manager's Office.

These minutes were revised and approved at the regular Select Board meeting of January 23, 2018.